

The Libertine Overthrow:
Or, a *MIRROR* for
Atheists;

Wherein they may clearly see their *Prodigious
Follies, Vast Extravagancies, Notorious Impieties
and Absurdities*;

Containing a Compendious Account of the *Egregious
Vicious Life, and Eminent and Sincere
Penitent Death*,

Of that Great States-Man, Eminent Poet, and
Learned Scholar,

JOHN Earl of *ROCHESTER*,

Who departed this Life the 26th of July,
MDCLXXX.

Wherein is briefly recited not only his Disputes and Arguments
against God and Religion, as the same were used in Confe-
rences with Divines, and at several Atheistical Meetings;
but also the chief of his notorious Pranks, such as his turning
Moutrabank, his Disgulfing himself in the shapes of Beggars,
his Amours, Revels, &c.

all which is added, The plain manner of his wonderful Con-
version, which was by hearing read the 4th Chapter of
Isaiah, his Christian deportment and Godly Expectations du-
ring his last Sickness; as also his Dying Remonstrance left
in Writing, and signed and attested by Eminent Witnesses.

The whole, for the use of the meanest Capacities, abstracted
from the Remarks of the Right Reverend D. Gilbert Burnet
now Bishop of *Sarum*, and the Reverend Mr. Forster, Chap-
lain to *Ann Countess of Rochester*.

Licentia Accordat, 10. Order.

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A Mirror for Atheists.

THE daily growth of Impiety and Atheism, amongst the meaner sort, obliges me to the publishing the ensuing compendious Abstract, wherein will appear the emptiness, shallowness and Insignificance of the greatest and wisest Arguments, against the Being of an Omnipotent Jehovah; in handling of which, I shall transcribe the Remarkable Passages of the Life of John Earl of Rochester, a Great Man, a greater Sinner, but at the last by divine Mercy, a most Eminent and Zealous Penitent. One who had for several Years, made it his Business to argue against God and Religion, and plac'd his Bliss and Happiness, his summum bonum, in carnal Pleasures and sensual Delights; but to be methodical, I shall give a short description of his Birth, Parentage and Education.

As for his Family, on both sides, from which he was descended, they were some of the most famous in their Generations. His Grandfather was that Excellent and truly great Man, Charles Lord Wilmot, Viscount Athlone in Ireland. Henry his Father, who inherited the same Title, and Greatness, was by his late Majesty King Charles the I. created Baron of Adderburg in Oxfordshire, and by King Charles the II. the Earl of Rochester. His Mother, of whom many worthy things may be spoken, was the Relict of Sir Francis Henry Lee of Ditchly, in the County of Oxford, Baronet,

and

and Daughter of that Generous and Honourable Gentleman Sir John, St. Johns of Lyddiard, in the County of Wilts, Baronet.

He was Born in April 1648. And as for his Education, it was in *Wadham College* in *Oxford*, under the care of that Wise and Excellent Governor Dr. *Blanford*, the late Right Reverend Bishop of *Worcester*; there it was he laid a good Foundation of Learning and Study, tho he afterwards built upon that foundation Hay and Strubble: there he first suck'd from the Breasts of his Mother the University those perfections of Wit, Eloquence and Poetry, which afterwards by his own corrupt Stomach, or some ill juices after were turn'd into Poyson to himself and others.

Leaving the University, he betook himself to Travel, from which he return'd in the 18th Year of his Age, and appear'd at Court with as great Advantages as most ever had, greatly signaling his Valour at Sea in the Year 65. when he went with the Earl of *Sandwich*, &c. He had so entirely laid down the Intemperance that was growing on him before his Travels, that at his Return he hated nothing more. But falling into Company that loved these Excesses, he was, tho not without difficulty; and by many Steps, brought back to it again. And the Natural Heat of his Fancy being inflamed by Wine, made him so extravagantly pleasant, that many, to be diverted more by that Humour, studied to engage him deeper and deeper in Intemperance; which at length did so entirely subdue him, that (as he told the Reverend Dr. *Burnet*, now Bishop of *Sarum*) for five Years together he was continually Drunk, not all the

while, under the visible Effects of it, but his Blood was so inflamed, that he was not in all that time cool enough to be perfect Master of himself. This led him to say and do many wild and unaccountable things. There were two Principles in his Natural temper, that being heightened by that Heat, carried him to great Excesses; a violent love of Pleasure, and a disposition to extravagant Mirth. The one involved him in great sensuality; the other led him to many odd Adventures and Frolics, in which he was oft in hazard of his Life. The one being the same Irregular Appetite in his Mind, that the other was in his Body, which made him think nothing diverting that was not extravagant. And tho' in cold Blood he was a generous and good Natured Man, yet he would go far in his Hears, after any thing that might turn to a Jest, or matter of Diversion. And so he came to bend his Wit, and divert his Studies and Endeavours to support and strengthen these ill Principles both in himself and others.

An accident fell out after this, which confirm'd him more in these Courses: (I shall relate it in the very Words of the Reverend D. Burnet) 'When he went to Sea in the Year 1665. there happen'd to be in the same Ship with him Mr. Mountague, and another Gentleman of Quality; these two, the former especially seem'd perswaded that they should never return into England. Mr. Mountague said he was sure of it, the other was not so positive: The Earl of Rochester, and the last of these, entered into a formal Engagement, not without Ceremonies of Religion, that if either of them died, he should appear, and give

' give the other Notice of a future state, if there
 ' was any. But Mr. Montague would not enter
 ' into the Bond. When the day came that they
 ' thought to have taken the Dutch Fleet in the Port
 ' of Bergen, Mr. Montague, though he had such
 ' a strong Presage in his Mind of his approaching
 ' Death, yet he generously staid all while in the
 ' the greatest Danger: The other Gentlemen sig-
 ' naliz'd his Courage in a most undaunted manner
 ' till near the end of the Action, when he fell
 ' on a sudden into such a trembling, that he could
 ' scarce stand; and Mr. Montague going to him
 ' to hold him up, as they were in each others
 ' Arms, a Cannon Ball killed him out-right, and
 ' carried away Mr. Montague's Belly, so that he
 ' Died within an Hour after. The Earl of Ro-
 ' chester (says the Doctor) told me, that these
 ' presages had in their Minds made some Impress-
 ' sion on him, that there were separated Beings;
 ' and that the Soul either by a Sagacity or some
 ' secret Notice communicated to it, had a sort of
 ' Divination: But that Gentleman never appear-
 ' ing was a great Snare to him during the rest of
 ' his Life.

As to the Supream Being, he had always some
 Impressions of one, and profess'd often that he never
 knew an entire Atheist who fully believ'd there
 was no God: yet when he explain'd this notion of
 his Being, it amounted to no more than a vast
 power, that had none of the Attributes of Good-
 ness or Justice, we ascribe to the Deity: These
 were his Thoughts about Religion. For Moral-
 ity, he freely own'd to me (saith the Reverend
 Dr. Burnet) that tho he talk'd of it, as a something,

yet

yet this was only because he thought it a decent way of speaking, and that as they went always in cloaths, tho' in their Frolicks they would have chosen sometimes to have gone Naked, if they had not feared the people; So tho' some of them found it necessary for humane Life to talk of Morality, yet he confessed they cared not for it, further than the Reputation of it was necessary for their credit, and Affairs; of which he gave many Instances, as their professing and swearing friendship, where they hated Mortality; their Oaths and Imprecations in their Addresses to Women, which they intended never to make Good: The delight they had in making people quarrel; their unjust usage of their Creditors, and putting them off by any deceitful promise they could invent; that might deliver them from present Importunity; of all which he afterwards sincerely Repented.

He would often go into the Country, and be for some Months wholly imployed in study, or the Sallies of his Witt; which he came to direct chiefly to *Satyre*. For his other Studies they were divided between the comical and witty Writings of the Antients and Moderns, the Roman Authors, and Books of Physick, which the ill state of Health he was fall'n into, made more necessary to himself: and which qualified him for an odd Adventure which I shall but briefly mention. Being under an unlucky Accident which obliged him to keep out of the way, he disguis'd himself, so that his nearest Friends could not have known him, and set up in *Tower-street* for an *Italian Mountebank*, where he had a stage, and practis'd Physick some weeks not without success. In his latter Years, he

he read Books of History more. He took pleasure to disguise himself as a Porter, or as a Beggar, sometimes to follow some mean Amours, which for the variety of them, he affected. At other times meerly for Diverſion, he would go about in odd ſhapes, in which he acted his part ſo naturally, that even thoſe who were on the Secret, and ſaw him in theſe ſhapes, could perceive nothing by which he might be diſcovered.

Befides the Deriſion calumnies and Jeers he put upon Religion in his Lampoons Satyrs, &c. it was too frequent a Cuſtom with him to meet with ſeveral diſſolute Perſons, purpoſely to ridicule and diſpute againſt Religion, &c. of which I ſhall give one memorable Inſtance related by Mr. *Parſons*, as the Earls own Words, One day at an Atheiſtical Meeting, at a Perſon of Qualities, I undertook to manage the Cauſe, and was the principal Diſputant againſt God and Piety, and for my performances received the applauſe of the whole company; upon which my mind was terribly ſtruck, and I immediately reply'd thus to my ſelf; Good God! That a man, that walks upright, that ſees the wonderful works of God, and has the uſe of his ſenſes and reaſon, ſhould uſe them to the deſying of his Creator! But tho' this was a good Beginning towards my Converſion, to find my Conſcience touch'd for my Sins, yet it went off again: nay all my Life long I had a ſecret value and reverence for an honeſt man, and lov'd Morality in others. But I had form'd an odd Scheme of Religion for my ſelf, which would ſolve all that God or Conſcience might force upon me; yet I was not ever well reconciled to the Buſineſs of Chriſtianity, nor had that Reverence for the Goſpel of Chriſt as I ought to have, p. 23. of E. of Rochesters Funeral Sermon.

In this Atheistical state of Mind, denying the Power of the Almighty: and despising his Ministers, he continued till by a most wonderful Providence, the Lord was pleased to open his Sin Blinded Eyes: And it was thus, as he gave the account to the Reverend Dr. Burnet.

Mr. Parsons in order to his Conviction, read to him the 53. Chapter of our Saviour's Passion, that he might there see a Prophecy concerning it, written many Ages before it was done; which the Jews that Blaphemed Christ, still kept in their Hands, as a Book divinely Inspired: He said it to me, said Mr. Parsons, That as he heard it read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his Mind, and convince him, that he could resist it no longer: For the Words had an Authority which did shoot like Rays or Beams in his Mind; so that he was not only convinced by the Reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a Power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did ever after as firmly believe in his Saviour, as if he had seen him in the Clouds. He had (said my Author) made it be read so often to him, that he had got it by Heart: and went through a great part of it in discourse with me, with a sort of Heavenly Pleasure, giving me his

Reflections on it: some few I remember,
 Psal. 1. Who hath believed our Report? Here, he said, was foretold the Opposition the Gospel was to meet with from such Wretches as he was. He
 Psal. 2. hath no form nor Comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no Beauty that we should desire him. On this he said, The meanness of his Appearance has made vain and foolish People despise him, because he came not in such a
 Psal.

fools *Count as they delight in*, thus far his own words.

Having thus far trac'd his Life, in several considerable and valuable Passages. I shall now Compendiously insert some of his chief Atheistical Arguments, used in defence of his immoralities, and vitious Practices, as the same were urg'd to, and answer'd by the Right Reverend Dr. Burnet, as I take it; upon their first Acquaintance.

The Three chief things they talked about were *Morality, Natural Religion, and Revealed Religion, Christianity* in particular: For *Morality* (saith my Author) the Earl confessed, he saw the necessity of it, both for the Government of the World, and for the Preservation of Health, Life, and Friendship, and was much ashamed of his former Practices, rather because he had made himself a Beast, and had brought pain and sickness on his Body, and had suffered much in his Reputation, than from any deep sense of a Supream Being or another State: But so far this went with him, that he resolv'd firmly to change the course of his Life, which he thought he should effect by the study of *Philosophy*, and had not a few no less solid than pleasant Notions concerning the folly and madness of Vice: but he confess'd he had no remorse for his past actions, as offences against God, but only as Injuries to himself and mankind.

Upon this Subject, saith the Reverend Doctor I shew'd him the Defects of *Philosophy* for reforming the World: That it was a matter of Speculation, which but few either had the leisure or capacity to enquire into. But the Principle that
must

must reform mankind, must be obvious to every man's Understanding. That *Philosophy* in matters of Morality, beyond the great lines of our Duty, had no very certain fixed Rule; but in the lesser Offices and Instances went much by the fancies of Men, and Customs of Nations and consequently could not have Authority enough to bear down the propensities of Nature, Appetite or Passion: For which (saith the Doctor) I instanced in two Points, The one was about that *Maxim* of the *Stoick*, to extirpate all sort of Passion and concern for any thing, &c. The other was upon the restraint of pleasure how far that was to go. Upon this saith my Author, he told me the two *Maxims* of his *Morality* then were, that he should do nothing to the hurt of any other, or that might prejudice his own Health: And he thought that all pleasure when it did not interfere with these was to be indulged as the Gratification of our Natural Appetites. It seemed, continued he, unreasonable to imagine these were put into man only to be restrained, or Curbed to such a narrowness: This he applied to the free use of Wine and Women.

To this, saith my Author, I answered, That if Appetites being natural, was an Argument for the Indulging them, then the Revengful might as well alledge it for Murder, and the Covetous for Stealing; whose Appetites are no less keen on those Objects; and yet it is acknowledg'd that these Appetites ought to be curb'd. If the difference is urg'd from the Injury that another Person receives, the Injury is as great, if a Man's Wife is defiled, or his Daughter corrupted: And it is impossible for a Man to let his Appetites loose to vagrant Lusts.

and not to transgress in these particulars. I further urged, said the Doctor, that *Morality* could not be a strong thing, unless a Man were determined by a Law within himself; for if he only measured himself by decency, or the Laws of the Land, this would teach him only to use such caution in his ill practices, that they should not break out too visibly; but would never carry him to an inward and universal probity: That Virtue was of so complicated a Nature, that unless a Man came intirely within its discipline, he could not adhere stedfastly to any one Precept; for Vices are often made necessary supports to one another. That this cannot be done, either steddily or with any Satisfaction, unless the Mind dos inwardly comply with, and delight in the Dictates of Virtue. And that could not be effected, except a man's nature were internally regenerated and changed by a higher Principle: Till that came about, corrupt Nature would be strong, and Philosophy but feeble: especially when it struggled with such appetites or Passions as were much kindled, or deeply rooted in the constitution of ones Body. This, said the Earl, sounded to him like *Enthusiasme*, or *Canting*: He had no Notion of it, and so could not understand it.

He comprehended the Dictates of *Reason* and *Philosophy*, in which as the Mind became much conversant, there would soon follow, as he believed, a greater easiness in obeying its precepts: I told him on the other hand, that all his Speculations of *Philosophy* would not serve him in any stead, to the reforming of his Nature and Life, till he applied himself to God for inward assistances. It

was certain, that the Impressions made in his Reason governed him, as they were lively presented to him: But these are so apt to slip out of our Memory, and we so apt to turn our thoughts from them, and at some times the contrary Impressions are so strong, that let a man set up a reasoning in his Mind against them, he finds that Celebrated saying of the Poet.

Video meliora probog; deteriora sequor.

I see what is better and approve it: but follow what is worse.

to be all that Philosophy will amount to. Whereas those who upon such Occasions apply themselves to God, by earnest Prayer, feel a disengagement from such Impressions, and themselves endued with a power to resist them. So that those bonds which formerly held them, fall off.

This he said must be the effect of a heat in Nature: it was only the strong diversion of the thoughts, that gave the seeming Victory, and he did not doubt but if one could turn to a *Problem* in *Euclid*, or to Write a Copy of Verses, it would have the same effect. To this I answer, That if such Methods did only divert the thoughts, there might be some force in what he said; but if they not only drove out such Inclinations, but begat Impressions contrary to them, and brought men into a new disposition and habit of mind; then he must confess there was somewhat more than a diversion, in these changes, which were brought on our minds by true Devotion.

He further said sometime after that he did not understand the Business of Inspiration; he believ'd the pen-men of the Scriptures had heats and honest-

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ty, and so writ: but could not comprehend how God should reveal his Secrets to mankind. He could not apprehend how there should be any corruption in the nature of Man, or a lapse derived from *Adam* — The Incoherences of stile in Scriptures the odd transitions, the seeming contradictions, chiefly about the order of time, the Cruelties enjoined the *Israelites* in destroying the *Canaanites*, Circumcision, and many other Rites of the Jewish worship seemed to him insupportable to the Divine Nature: And the first three Chapters of *Genesis*, he thought could not be true unless they were Parables. This was the substance of what he excepted to *Revealed Religion* in general, and to the *Old Testament* in particular.

But in all these things (said the Reverend *B. Burnet*) I told him he was in the wrong way, where he examined the Business of Religion, by some dark parts of Scripture: Therefore I desir'd him to consider the whole contexture of the *Christian Religion*, the Rules it gives, and the methods it prescribes, nothing can conduce more to the peace, order and happiness of the World than to be govern'd by its Rules, nothing is more for the interest of every Man in particular: the Rules of Sobriety, Temperance and Moderation were the best preservers of Life, and which was perhaps more, of Health; Humility, Contempt of the vanities of the World, and the being well employed, rais'd a man's mind to a freedom from the follies and temptations that haunted the greatest part. Nothing was so generous and great as to supply the necessities of the Poor, and to forgive Injuries: nothing rais'd and maintained a Man's Reputation so much, as to be

be exactly just and merciful, Kind, Charitable and Compassionate: Nothing opened the powers of a Man's Soul so much as a calm Temper, a serene Mind; free of passion and disorder: Nothing made Societies, Families, and Neighbourhoods so happy as when these Rules which the Gospel prescribes, take place, of doing as we would have others to do to us, and loving our Neighbours as our selves. The *Christian Worship* is also plain and simple, suitable to so pure a Doctrine; the ceremonies of few and significant.

The Issue of all this Discourse was, He told the Reverend D. Burnet, that he saw Vice and Impiety were as contrary to Humane Society, as wild Beasts let loose would be; and therefore he firmly resolved to change the whole method of his Life, to become strictly just and true, to be chaste and Temperate, to forbear swearing and Irreligious Discourse, to Worship and Pray to his Maker. And that tho' he was not arrived at a full persuasion of *Christianity*, he would never employ his Wit to run it down or corrupt others; This Hopeful Bud of Grace, by the Blessing of God so fructified, that in a short time he became not an *almost*, but an *altogether* Christian. Some Instances I shall compendiously give. And

I. His hearty concern for the pious Education of his Children, wishing that his Son might never be a *Wit*, that is, (as himself explained it) one of those wretched Creatures, who pride themselves in abusing God and Religion denying his Being, or his Providence, but that he might become an *Honest* and a *Religious Man*, which could only be the support and Blessing of his Family; Complaining, what a vicious and
naughty

naughty World they were brought into, and that no Fortunes or Honours were comparable to the Love and Favour of God to them, in whose name he Blessed them, Pray'd for 'em, and committed them to his Protection.

And here I must not pass by his pious and most passionate Exclamation to a Gentleman of some Character, who came to visit him in his last Sickness: O Remember that you condemn God no more, he is an avenging God, and will visit you for your sins; with in mercy I hope, touch your Conscience sooner or later as he has done mine; you and I have been Friends and Sinners together a great while, therefore I am the more free with you; we have been all mistaken in our conceits and Opinions; our persuasions have been false and groundless, therefore God grant you Repentance. And seeing him the next day again, he said to him, Perhaps you were disobliged by my plainness yesterday; I spake the words of Truth, and soberness to you, and (striking his hand upon his Breast) said, I hope God will touch your Heart. To this may be added, his Comfortable Persuasions of Gods accepting him to his Mercy, saying three or four days before his Death, I shall die, but oh! What unspeakable Glories do I see! What Joys beyond thought or Expression; am I sensible of? I am assured of Gods Mercy to me through Jesus Christ. Oh how I long to die and to be with my Saviour.

The time of his Sickness and Repentance was just nine Weeks; in all which time, he was so much Master of his Reason, and had so clear an understanding, (saying 30. hours, about the middle of it, in which he was delirious) that he never dictated or spoke more composed in his Life: and therefore if any shall continue to say, his Piety was the effect

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of Madneſs or Vapours; let me tell them it is highly diſingenuous, and that the Aſſertion is as ſilly as it is wicked. nor was this thing done in a corner, numbers viſited and attended him; and ſurely, if any, the learned Phyſicians, that were converſant with him in the whole courſe of his tedious ſickneſs, are competent Judges of a *Phrenſy* or *Delirium*.

To conclude theſe Remarks, I ſhall inſert his dying Remembrance, ſufficiently attested and ſigned by his own Hand, as his trueſt ſence, (which I hope may be uſeful for that Good end he deſign'd it,) in manner and form following.

For the benefit of all thoſe whom I may have drawn into ſin by My example and encouragement, I leave to the world this my laſt Declaration, which I deliver in the preſence of the great God, who knows the ſecrets of all hearts, and beſor whom I am now appearing to be judged.

That from the bottom of my ſoul I deſect and abhor the whole courſe of my former wicked life; that I think I can never ſufficiently admire the goodneſs of God, who has given me a true ſenſe of my pernicious Opinions and vile Practices, by which I have hitherto lived without Hope, and without God in the world; have been an Open Enemy to Jeſus Chriſt, doing the utmoſt deſpite to the holy Spirit of Grace. And that the greateſt testimony of my Charity to ſuch is, to warn 'em in the Name of God, and as they regard the welfare of their Immortal Souls, no more to deny his Being, or his Providence, or deſpiſe his Goodneſs: no more to make a mock of Sin, or condemn the pure and excellent Religion of my ever Bleſſed Redeemer, thro' whoſe Merits alone I one of the Greateſt of Sinners, do yet hope for Mercy and Forgiveneſs. Amen.

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Declared and Sign'd in the preſence of

ANNE ROCHESTER,

J. ROCHESTER.

ROBERT PARSONS. Jun. 16. 1683.

F I N I S.